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Governor Baker, Frontline Child Protection Workers Announce DCF Reforms
System-Wide Reforms to Strengthen Child Protection Efforts

BOSTON – Today, Governor Charlie Baker, child protection workers and Department of Children and Families (DCF) officials jointly announced system-wide reforms to Department policies and efforts to support frontline social workers and protect the Commonwealth's children. The reforms include new intake and supervisor policies for the first time in a decade, and the reestablishment of the DCF Central Regional Office.

“Systemic policy reforms are necessary to support the efforts of our social workers, supervisors and managers who are on the front lines protecting the Commonwealth’s children,” **said Governor Charlie Baker.** “Reducing caseloads, retaining and recruiting social workers and ensuring clear and concise policies for supervision and case management are all necessary to ensuring the agency is able to focus on its primary duty of keeping children safe. Our administration looks forward to working with House Speaker DeLeo, Senate President Rosenberg and the legislature on this important work moving forward.”

Management and union leadership have agreed to enact several further reforms and recommendations that accelerate the implementation of key priorities from the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) report issued in May of 2014, in addition to action steps in the wake of recent tragedies involving the Department.

Governor Baker also requested an independent review of the recent Bella Bond case by the Independent Office of the Child Advocate (OCA).

The 2014 CWLA report is the blueprint for change within the agency. The report's author, Linda Spears, was named by Governor Baker to lead DCF beginning in February 2015. Recommendations including Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) background checks for foster homes, photo-documentation for all cases and those transferred between offices and social workers, and new guidance for home visits have already been implemented.

“For years, social workers and investigators have called for meaningful reform and investment at DCF, but we’ve only seen attempts at quick fixes,” **said social worker Peter MacKinnon, DCF Chapter President of SEIU Local 509.** “This is an unprecedented collaboration between frontline child protection workers and agency administrators. Working together, we will succeed in doing what has been necessary for so long – making deep, systemic changes.”

Among the reforms and changes announced today is the reinstatement of social work technician positions which will perform non-clinical support services, providing options for current DCF employees who have not yet become licensed. Since the licensing requirement was instituted for social workers last year, approximately 82% of workers have attained licensing, up from 50% when the law went into effect. These positions and the DCF Central Office were eliminated due to budget reductions in 2009.

“Social work technicians were an important resource providing non-clinical support such as a child’s transportation to and from appointments,” **said Marylou Sudders, Secretary of the Executive Office of Health and Human Services.** “Reinstating this position will allow licensed social workers to focus more on case management and the children under their supervision.”

The Department will also augment efforts to increase the number of safe foster homes and families available to children by reducing the applicant backlog safely and efficiently. DCF will also work with social service providers to review applications in the interim as new foster home social workers are recruited and hired.

“We are always in need of families willing to foster children and are committed to reducing the backlog for those who have applied,” **said DCF Commissioner Linda Spears.** “We look forward to partnering with the union and our social service providers in these efforts in order to ensure a thorough review and licensing process, and more strong families to care for children in need.”

In addition to the changes announced today, the administration also reminded the public

that all have a responsibility to assist in keeping children safe and if given reason to suspect a child is being abused or neglected, should report anonymously by calling the **Child Protection Hotline at 1-800-792-5200**.

New DCF Intake Policy

The Department's intake policy covering the period of time from when an allegation of abuse or neglect is filed (51a) through the investigation, substantiation of a claim and opening of a case, has not been updated in 12 years. Through negotiations with SEIU Local 509 leadership already underway, the policy will be **updated by November 17, 2015**. Reforms will include:

- Standardized risk assessment tools for social workers
- CORI checks in all DCF cases (Currently used in approximately 70% of cases)
- Review of the entire family or household's prior or current involvement with DCF
- Review of frequency and type of emergency (9-1-1 calls) responses to the home
- Parental capacity assessment

New Supervisor Policy

The new supervisor policy to be **implemented by November 17, 2015** consistently across all DCF offices, will include detailed, mandated steps for case review and management support necessary to working with all families and especially those with complex conditions, ensuring all information about the family is understood and special consultation is provided for thorough understanding of a case and decisions to protect the children involved.

Examine All Complex Cases Within the Department

Regional Directors began examining more complex in-home cases where there are multiple abuse reports. DCF directors will use a nationally developed child welfare continuous quality improvement (CQI) tool to assess several facets of cases including: safety, stability, placement needs, permanency, wellbeing, engagement of service providers, understanding of case situation and context.

Retention and Recruitment of Social Workers; Reinstating Technicians

The stress of high caseloads at an average of 20.66:1 in July is cited as a primary reason for the loss of social workers and the Department continues to target an 18:1 average caseload. DCF management and union leadership will make a concerted effort to develop strategies for retention and recruitment of social workers **by Fall of 2015**, as the Department continues to hire new social workers with the \$35.5 million increase provided

n the Fiscal Year 2016 budget. DCF will also work towards **reinstating social work technicians**, first eliminated due to budget reductions in 2009 and critical to providing non-clinical support for caseworkers and families.

Reestablishing the Central Massachusetts Regional Office

Budget reductions in 2009 also forced the closing of DCF's Central MA Regional Office, resulting in the Western Office taking on more than 50% of the state's geography and caseload. The Department will reinstate the Central Regional Office in Worcester by January 1, 2016, with managerial, administrative, legal, nursing and other staff to increase frontline workers' access to supervision and other support resources.

Reduce Backlog for Foster Home Applicants

The Department will initiate further efforts by this fall to meet the immediate needs for placing children in safe, caring foster homes, working with social service providers to review applicants and reduce the applicant backlog.

Other Reforms and Policy Updates

The Department and union leadership by March of 2016, will also develop and implement a new Practice Model as well as policies around Ongoing Casework, Family Assessment and Service Planning, Case Closing and Coordination with service partners, Data Integration, and Foster Homes – all reforms recommended by the CWLA Blueprint.

New Specialist Positions include: medical social workers statewide, Central Regional Director, Ombudsperson, Assistant Commissioner for Adoption and Foster Care, and Director of Strategic Initiatives.

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